Neturei Karta International
Jews United Against Zionism

Judaism an Alternative to Zionism

*This lecture was presented by **Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss** of Neturei Karta International at a seminar on issues of Islamophobia, hosted by the Islamic Human Rights Commission. It was delivered at the NGO Forum of the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa on August 28, 2001.*

With God's help; By the grace and kindness of God, the Almighty – My dear guests and delegates, may the Creator's blessings be upon this assembly and may His wisdom inform all its actions.

Abraham, the mutual forefather of the Jewish people and their Arabic cousins, is described by Efron in the Bible as "a prince of the Lord in our midst. (Genesis 23:5)" Since man does not live in isolation, one of the goals of the true religious personality is to achieve a degree of devotion capable of evoking the praise of all men and their desire to emulate his piety.

From Abraham's days this was the sole agenda of the Jewish people. The revelation at Mt. Sinai placed an enormous burden upon our people. We were summoned to be "a kingdom of priests and a Holy nation. (Exodus 19:6)"

Down through the ages Jews lived a humble, holy existence, at peace with all men and served as loyal and co-operative citizens in the nations amongst whom they dwelled.

One hundred years ago, a Jew, far removed from his faith and in total ignorance of its basic beliefs, launched the movement today known as Zionism. Its early adherents were almost uniformly drawn from the ranks of Jews who had previously abandoned their faith.

Time does not permit us to catalogue in detail the evil effects of this ideology upon Jews themselves and how it led them to abandon the beliefs and practices of the Torah. Rather, for the purposes of this conference we will, God willing, explain why Zionism is a rejection of Judaism and how its demise is the only path to true peace.

All mankind stands aghast at the terrible suffering in the Middle East. Innocents on both sides are swept up in a spiral of seemingly never ending bloodshed. The world searches for a solution.

Our perspective is representative of the Torah view, maintained by hundreds of thousands of Jews worldwide, which offers a real alternative to the current impasse.

Our position is that of the Talmud and Midrash which explicitly prohibit premature attempts to end exile. Indeed, we are told that it is metaphysically impossible for there to be a real cessation of hostilities so long as the Jewish people are in violation of the terms of their exile.

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With this introduction complete let us now turn to the details of the dilemma now before us.

What is the traditional Torah belief concerning the Holy land?

The Holy Land was a conditional Divine gift. It was a place set aside for God's worship. But it was given conditionally. The Bible foretold that if the "children of Israel" should fail in their spiritual task, they would be banished from the land and sent into exile. This exilic punishment will last until the Lord in His mercy, sees fit to end history as we know it, by ushering in the Messianic era – a time of universal brotherhood and peace. This utopian future will feature the worship of God by all mankind, centered in the Holy Land and the city of Jerusalem.

In the Additional Service recited on every major Jewish holiday we find the following prayer, "And because of our sins we were exiled from our land and removed from our soil and we cannot now go up and appear and prostrate ourselves before You."

These prayers represented nothing new in the way of doctrine to those who instituted and recited them. From the time of the Temple's destruction and throughout Jewish history our people always regarded their exile as a Divine punishment. Indeed, no Jews ever dared suggest in the thousands of years of our exile that the Romans had destroyed the Temple due to a lack of Jewish military preparedness or resources. Rather, the Temple was lost physically because of the Jewish people's failure to live up to their spiritual obligations to God.

Indeed, despite thousands of years in exile, frequent exclusion and persecution, no Jew ever suggested that the Holy Land could or should be retaken by force of arms. Exile was, indeed, a physical state. Yet, it was completely caused and perpetuated by spiritual forces. Thus, the only means to end exile and usher in the promised era of peace and worldwide brotherhood, were and are spiritual. They consist of the essential practices of our faith -- repentance, prayer, Torah study and good works.

In the words of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (German Jewish leader 1808 – 1888), "During the reign of Hadrian when the uprising led by Bar Kochba proved a disastrous error, it became essential that the Jewish people be reminded for all times of an important, essential fact, namely that (the people of) Israel must never again attempt to restore its national independence by its own power; it was to entrust its future as a nation solely to Divine Providence." (Hirsch Siddur, 1969: 703)

Again Rabbi Hirsch writes, "We mourn over that which brought about that destruction (of the Temple), we take to heart the harshness we have encountered in our years of wandering as the chastisement of a father, imposed on us for our improvement, and we mourn the lack of observance of Torah which that ruin has brought about. . . This destruction obliges us to allow our longing for the far away land to express itself only in mourning, in wishing and hoping; and only through the honest fulfillment of all Jewish duties to await the realization of this hope. But it forbids us to strive for the reunion or possession of the land by any but spiritual means." (Horeb, 1981: 461)

The attempt to explain the exile in this-worldly terms is not simply an error of doctrine or a distortion of Jewish history. It strikes at the core of Jewish belief. In fact, the Maharal of Prague (Czechoslovakian Rabbi and pivotal medieval Jewish leader, 1525 – 1609) writes that a Jew should rather give up his life than attempt to end exile by conquering the Holy Land. (Netzach Yisroel, 24)

Why? Why was this seen as so basic to our belief system?

In simple terms -- if one views the exile as the result of military cause and effect, then the very heart and soul is ripped out of Jewish destiny and Divine guidance. By asserting our right to alter the Divine plan of exile as punishment, repentance, expiation and miraculous return, we assert that the essence of Jewish destiny is fundamentally capable of being altered by other than spiritual forces. God is then exiled from the drama and final resolution of mankind's hopes.

*Of course, exile is far more than mere punishment. The Jewish people were sent amongst the nations in order to

proclaim by word and deed the truths of God's existence and His revelatory injunctions for all men.

In the words of Rabbeinu Bachya (12th century Saragossian Biblical commentator) "The Jewish people should spread among the nations in order that those nations should learn from them belief in the existence of God and the flow of Divine Providence regarding the particulars of men."

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Tragically, two events coalesced to cloud over the above, once universally recognized truths among the Jewish people. First, the exile dragged on for hundreds and eventually thousands of years. Second, in the aftermath of the Enlightenment, many Jews abandoned Torah faith. Thus, those Jews who no longer saw exile in Divine terms sought to explain it as nothing more than the result of this worldly powerlessness.

In their frustration at the length of the exile they demonized all nations. In their view all Gentiles would forever hate the Jewish people. Therefore, they reasoned, we must immediately end exile by political and, if need be, military means. Thus, was born the pseudo religion of Zionism.

This necessitated ignoring the Palestinian inhabitants of the land. When this strategy became impossible, the Zionist movement and later the Israeli state sought to depict them as unreasonable enemies for whom military conquest was the only just fate.

Accordingly, both exilic missions (repentance and serving as a "light unto the nations") were damaged by the ideology of Zionism.

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We are called upon by Zionism to view all Arab nations as our enemies. We are forever exhorted to dwell on anti – Semitism, real and imagined, in order to justify the creation of the state and its subsequent aggressions. This obsession with wars, terror and counter terror, the subjugation of the Palestinians, reparations and claims upon all nations and ever wilder charges of anti – Semitism, provide an inviting substitute religion for many Jews. This heresy was particularly tempting to Jews ignorant of Torah and due to historical and cultural forces, estranged from their faith.

The costs of all this in terms of our true exilic tasks are staggering. In place of fulfilling our quiet role of being a "light unto the nations", we are forever dragged into a bloody conflict with the Palestinian people. Thousands of innocents on both sides continually suffer. Jewry worldwide has little time or patience for its primary task -- the worship of God and its derivative benefit -- the sanctification of His Name.

There is no need for Jews to be seen as the enemies of the Islamic world. There is no need for Jews to be forever accusing Popes and governments of having insufficiently apologized to us for past wrongs – real and imagined. There is no need for Jewry to base its collective political strategies in America and Europe on a "Is it good for Israel?" basis, thus alienating and angering their fellow citizens.

Beyond these factors, there remains the tragic fact that much of mankind sees the Israeli state as representative of the Jewish people. Thus, the state which has rejected or, at best, ignored God, conveys the message to humanity that the essence of Jewishness is a secular nationalism.

Further, the claim of Israel to represent world Jewry links all of our people to the state's acts of violence against the Palestinian people. This is a frustrating and embarrassing lie. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many Jews in the Holy Land and around the world are greatly pained and anguished by the suffering and persecution of the Palestinian people. Of course, our hearts bleed whenever innocent Jews suffer. But, this need not blind a moral people to the similar sufferings of the other. This is precisely the point—Zionism is a recipe for endless suffering among both Jews and Palestinians.

In the words of Grand Rabbi, Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum zt'l (of blessed memory, originally of Hungary, who lived in New York after WW II, 1888 – 1980), "In sum, the hatred against the Jewish community is because it is said that those who are not Torah observant, who are heretics, are the leaders of Jewry. The nations of the world are misled by them and acquire a hatred of Jews. One of the greatest commandments there is, to be observed with utmost self-sacrifice, would be to make known to the nations of the world that they (Zionists and irreligious leaders) are not the representatives of the Jewish community. (And to tell them) that observant Jews have no connection with them." (Dibros Kodesh, 1986: 210-11)

The vast majority of Jews rejected Zionism when it first began. In the early part of the century, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem (not to be confused with the Chief Rabbis of the State of Israel), Rabbi Yoseph Chaim Zonnenfeld negotiated with King Hussein in order to help the Orthodox Jewish community escape the Zionist machinations. This resulted in the assassination by Haganah operatives in 1924 of the Rabbi's advisor, Dr. Jacob Israel de Haan. In 1948 Rabbi Yosef Zvi Duchinsky of Jerusalem sent an urgent petition to the United Nations, asking that the Orthodox community in the Holy Land be exempted from Zionist rule. These were not isolated incidents. For over a century Zionism has been opposed by large segments of Orthodox Jewry in Jerusalem, the Holy Land and around the world. Many continue to do so today. In fact, they refuse any form of recognition of, or co-operation with the state. They frequently pay for their opposition to the state by being arrested, beaten and, at times, murdered. Their voices are generally ignored in the Israeli press and throughout the world.

Zionist assertions to having solved the "Jewish question" by "ending exile" have proven a dismal failure. If anything, the Zionist's claim to having created a safe haven for Jewry is patently false. The truth is that Israel today, whether governed by "doves" or "hawks" is the most dangerous place in the world for Jews. Such was to be expected, as Israel's very creation was an act of defiance against the Creator's guidelines.

Our position is the only one offering a real alternative to the status quo. Anti – Zionist Jews believe that the one path to peace in the Middle East, the only means for Jews to fulfill their proper role in exile and the only path demonstrating justice and kindness towards the Palestinians, is the total dismantling of the Israeli state. Only then, with sovereignty transferred to Palestinian rule, will a true peace be attained.

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After 53 years of having our blood shed on the altar of a nineteenth century colonial, nationalism, misapplied to the Jewish people, having spilled rivers of blood of other peoples, it is high time that world Jewry subject the first assumptions of Zionism to criticism.

What has been accomplished by linking our people's fate to that of the state?

At root, Zionism has succeeded in changing the definition of Jewry from that of a people of faith, intent on achieving closeness to the Creator in this world, to that of a barren secular, ethnic identity. It has exacerbated anti Jewish sentiments around the world.

It behooves those Torah Jews who have known, since Zionism's inception, that only ill could come of its dreams, to urge world Jewry to accept the only suitable alternative.

This alternative would not demand Jewish political rule over the Temple Mount or Jerusalem. The "non negotiability of Jerusalem" is not a Torah concept. Indeed, the true Torah concept is to relinquish the notions of Zionism and abandon, in a peaceful fashion, the current Zionist sovereignty over the land.

This need not sadden any Jew. It is far better to relinquish political power than fail in our religious/moral task as the Torah nation. It is far better to practice kindness and fairness to all men as dictated by the Torah, than it is to be drawn into a never ending battle with the Palestinians, the Islamic world, the entire Third World and increasingly the nations and peoples of Europe and North America. We Jews have a task, but it is not to be dispossessors or aggressors.

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The serious alternative to Zionism is the faith of Judiasm. In Rav Hirsch's powerful description:

"Picture every son of Israel a respectful and influential priest of righteousness and love, disseminating among the nations not specific Judaism – for proselytism is forbidden – but pure humanity. . . How impressive, how sublime it would have been if there lived a people. . . who beheld in material possessions only the means for practicing justice and love towards all, a people whose minds imbued with the wisdom and truth of the Law, maintained simple, straightforward views, and emphasized them for themselves and others in expressive, vivid symbolic acts." (Nineteen Letters, 1960:108-9)

To the Palestinian people and the other peoples here represented: You have no quarrel with the Jewish people. We are not your enemies. Our message is simple. Let us endeavor to live in peace and true mutual respect.

To our fellow Jews we ask that you all embrace the faith of our ancestors as revealed on Sinai; that you deal justly and kindly with all men and that we all work towards the day of ultimate brotherhood and redemption for mankind.

Our prayer to God is that the Israeli state be speedily and peacefully dismantled without any further shedding of Jewish or Palestinian blood and that we be worthy of seeing the full revelation of God's glory in the world, Amen.

Rabbi Yisrol Dovid Weiss is an Orthodox Jewish rabbi, a spokesman for Neturei Karta International, Jews United Against Zionism. He travels worldwide to exploring that not only is the State of "Israel" a violation of international law, but also that the whole Zionist ideology is built on a rebellion against the Almighty. He is constantly clarifying the difference between Judaism and Zionism, which Zionism is a transformation of Judaism from a religion to nationalism.

Rabbi Weiss attends frequently in international pro-Palestinian conferences, meets with high ranking Arab dignitaries, and has a history of building bridges between Arab and Jewish communities, in an effort of restoring the historic beautiful coexistence between Arabs and Jews in all Muslim countries. He stresses always that the traditional pious Jews who observe the teachings of the Torah, the people of the book, take no part in the oppression against the Palestinian people. On the contrary, they oppose it in the strongest terms and constantly pray for the speedy and peaceful dismantling of the State of "Israel" at the time when we all will once again be able to live in peace and harmony.

Rabbi Weiss visited Yemen, Lebanon, Iran, Gaza, Qatar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, South Africa and more, to participate in conferences, lecturing in Universities, speaking for the masses and personally meeting with many religious and governmental leaders. He spoke at the UN conference on Racism at Durban South Africa in 2001 and much more. He visited Gaza in July and December of 2009 as part of an aid convoy to the suffering Palestinians.

Neturei Karta International is an apolitical religious organization, which its work in the past has reached great achievements and is well known in many parts of the world.

For more information contact us at:

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